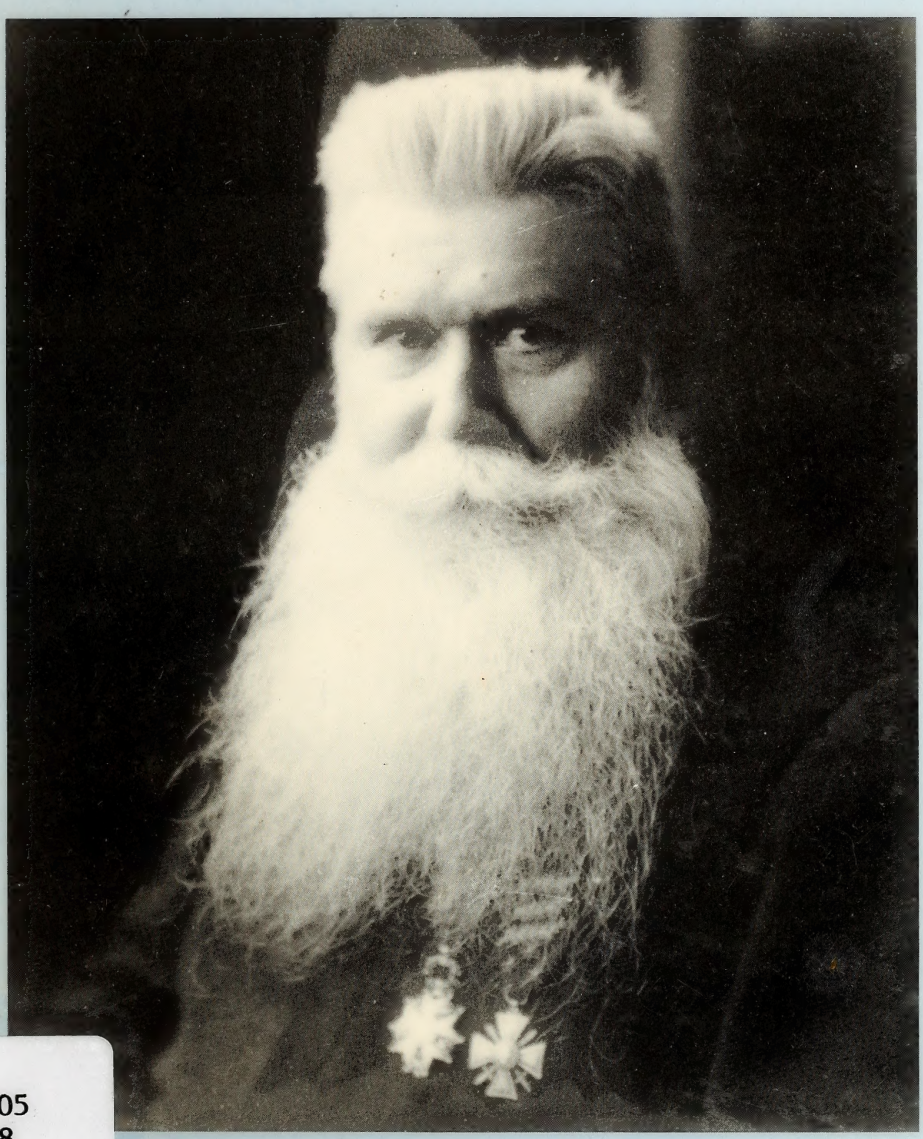
Man of Action, Man of God

The Life and Spirit of Blessed Daniel Brottier CSSp



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MAN OF ACTION, MAN OF GOD

The Life and Spirit of Blessed Daniel Brottier CSSp.

Edited by

Alphonse Gilbert CSSp
and Myles Fay CSSp

Born in 1876 at Ferté-Saint-Cyr to the west of Paris, Daniel Brottier from his earliest years felt called to the priesthood. He answered the call firstly by volunteering for his own diocese of Blois. Subsequently, however, he joined the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1902 and served as a missionary in Senegal from 1903 to 1911.

On his return to France for health reasons he took up work fund-raising for the cathedral of Dakar. World War I intervened before this project went very far. He volunteered as a chaplain and ministered in the front lines for four years of the war. He became a legendary figure for his courage in caring for troops on the battlefield.

Almost miraculously preserved from death and wounds, twice decorated and six times mentioned in despatches, Daniel Brottier founded the organisation for French Ex-Servicemen in the post-war years. In 1923, he was seconded by the Holy Ghost Fathers to the orphanage of Auteuil in Paris, a work founded 60 years earlier by the Abbé Roussel. Due to the deprivations of war this had fallen on evil times.

Turning to St. Thérèse of Lisieux for heavenly help, Fr Brottier threw himself into the task of building up this orphanage into a substantial contribution to the welfare of vagrant youth in all of modern France. At his death there were 15 houses with 1200 young people in care. The work has continued to grow and has been marked by an almost miraculous flow of funds to keep it prospering.

Shortly after his death, people began to seek favours through the intercession of Daniel Brottier. The collected volumes recording favours received amount to 1200 closely printed pages. Fr Brottier's body was exhumed in 1962 and found incorrupt. He was beatified on 25 November 1984 by Pope John Paul II.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Preface: A Visit to Auteuil	5
Jean Gosselin: The Life and Work of Fr. Daniel Brottier	8
Fr. Jean P. Le Gall, C.S.Sp: The Man Whom Grace Turned into a Saint	18
Fr. Gabriel David, C.S.Sp: The Heart of Auteuil	27
Fr. Alphonse Gilbert, C.S.Sp: In the Footsteps of Fr. Libermann	35
Fr. Marcel Martin, C.S.Sp: Daniel Brottier, the Holy Ghost Father	52
Fr. Myles L. Fay, C.S.Sp: Epilogue	55
Further Reading on Father Daniel Brottier	57

PREFACE

A VISIT TO AUTEUIL

By way of preparation for editing this work on Fr Brottier I spent a few days with my Spiritan confreres at Auteuil on the outskirts of Paris. I began with a prayer at Father Brottier's grave, my first visit to it in ten years. (On that occasion I was formally presenting a past student of Auteuil to the bishop for Ordination to the priesthood after his studies at Chevilly). People were praying at the grave and then moving to the altar and statue of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, with its relic, just to the left. They were obviously joining the two "saints" in one religious act. A lady beside me kept repeating, "Good Father Brottier, Good Father Brottier!" I had heard a similar invocation at the grave of another Holy Ghost Father, far away on the island of Mauritius, "Good Father Laval, Good Father Laval!" I felt in my heart that she was heard, God listens to the prayers of the humble. Here, as on Mauritius, the humble gather, the little ones, the distressed, the outcast, whose plight is equalled only by their trust. Evidently both Daniel Brottier and James Laval are continuing the apostolate to the most abandoned that they began on earth in different circumstances but in the one spirit. A simple basket on the grave was filled with folded scraps of paper, some of them carefully prepared beforehand, others torn from a copybook. In my own indiscreet way I unfolded a few. I heard later that the basket receives thousands of these! They read:

I am alone in my pain; I expect the worst; Father Brottier, help me — Father Brottier, take pity on my baby — My little daughter has had an accident, fractured skull, broken legs; Father Brottier, save her — For my birthday twelve, I got a hundred francs; here are fifty for children with no parents; is that all right? — With both legs amputated, my pain is dreadful; Father Brottier, do something for me — I feel alone, I cannot cope, I am lonely and lost, I have only you, dear Father Brottier — I cannot pray any more, help me — Father Brottier, pray for this old priest who should retire but has nowhere to

go — I love God, I want to serve God, but I am not even baptized and I have sinned; what am I to do? Help me.

I prayed along with these people, feeling their reassurance. Father Brottier himself prayed with the boldness of humility. "They reproach me for wanting too expensive a chapel, but I asked Little Thérèse herself: Do you want a simple dress or a pretty one?" She sent enough for a very pretty one. There is the added fact that I was cured myself by Father Brottier. In 1943 I was being treated unsuccessfully for an infectious wound in the foot until until I found a picture (one of two million that had been printed!) of Fr. Brottier and placed it on the wound. Within a few hours the infection was gone and the skin cured. I went to report the cure to Fr. Duval, the new director of Auteuil, only to find a gentleman there with Father Brottier's breviary, which had cured his daughter of meningitis by the mere touch. These memories came back to me as I watched the people touch Father Brottier's grave. His body was found perfectly preserved when it was exhumed in 1962, 26 years after his death.

In the playground I noticed the varied nationalities of today's young people at Auteuil, many of them reminders of recent catastrophes: the boat-people of Vietnam, Laotian exiles, refugees from Cambogia, children from Uganda, Asiatics, Africans, South Americans. "Widen the domain of your charity", Pope Pius XI had said to Father Brottier. This is precisely what has happened. Auteuil is a sampling of the evils of our day. Behind each face is a family or social tragedy that weighs heavily on the young person's affective and psychological balance. Young people from France, from the third and fourth worlds, all hide sufferings behind their brave appearance.

My Spiritan confreres at Auteuil would keep repeating that the real need is for love and understanding, over and above money to receive and train these youths. At community prayer they pray Father Brottier to send educators who are sincere and deeply Christian, trained in the latest pedagogical sciences, but with a heart "as big as that", as big as Father Brottier's. I spent a night-vigil with some of these educators before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the lower chapel. Strength and love must come from above for a task like theirs. The chaplains of the Auteuil houses are full of hope and zeal. But they are aging and thinning out. In this new kind of micro-

cosm young Spiritans from other countries, young African Spiritans, might find a way of giving their life for abandoned youth. I thought of this when I remembered how many will read these pages from the new provinces and foundations.

It is with a thought for them, and for people of every nation who do not know Father Brottier, that we have edited this issue, letting those speak who are most knowledgeable on his life, work, and spirit. His beatification is near. We are offering inspiration, documentation and bibliography for publications in other languages when the moment comes. And we have tried also to trace his Spiritan charism in the steps of Father Libermann.

St. Francis de Sales said, "the gospel is written music, the saint is sung music". Daniel Brottier, C.S.Sp., sang the gospel with his whole life! *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis.* God is wonderful in his saints!

Alphonse Gilbert, C.S.Sp.

* * *

This book was originally published as *Spiritan Papers,* No. 17, one issue of a review intended primarily for members of the Holy Ghost Congregation. In giving this study to a wider audience, we trust they will forgive us the family pietas evident in these pages and rejoice with us in the gift of knowing Daniel Brottier.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF FATHER DANIEL BROTTIER

Father Brottier's entire life was filled with God, the God of love whose tenderness and mercy St. Thérèse of Lisieux showed out afresh at the end of the nineteenth century, tinged as it still was with Jansenism. His life was oriented towards "the poor and little ones", from Senegal to Auteuil — God's chosen ones. It was enlivened by a faith that swept all obstacles aside, that motivated his every action and kept him in close union with God.

Daniel Brottier was born on 7 September 1876 at La Ferté-Saint-Cyr, a pretty little village not far from the town of Chambord in the Department of Loire-et-Cher. The house he was born in lay close to the château; his father was coachman to the Marquis of Durfort. He always wanted to be a priest, and started learning Latin even before he started school. His little witticism, "I will be Pope", had a depth beyond the ordinary, it revealed his personality unambiguously, his first indication of the "all or nothing" that marked the main steps of his life: missionary in Dakar, priest in the trenches in 1914-1918, builder of the Dakar cathedral and of the Auteuil chapel. It recalls Little Thérèse's "I will become a Saint". Both statements are bold, direct expressions of a spiritual type, a desire to live close to God; they link two souls which continue to work in tandem.

THE CALL

Daniel made his first holy communion in 1886 at the age of ten, and entered the junior seminary of Blois the following year. His school companions remember a lively, outgoing boy, even mischievous, but good-hearted. After the long years of the senior seminary he was ordained priest 22 October 1899 by Bishop Laborde of Blois. He was assigned to the Free School of Pontlevoy, where he worked marvels with the

children. But something was wanting, his field of action was limited, his apostolic soul sought outlet. He chose to become a missionary and entered the Holy Ghost Congregation. The exchange of heart-rending letters with his parents and family makes clear that the latter, although greatly anguished, accepted the sacrifice with a good heart.

After a year's novitiate at Orly near Paris he left for Africa in 1903. He wrote the following words to Archbishop Le Roy, the superior general, witnessing to his thirst for the apostolate, born of a deep life of prayer: "I have always envisaged the missionary's life as that of people willing to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of souls". Again, they indicate the "all or nothing" of his life pattern.

ST. LOUIS IN SENEGAL

To his disappointment Fr. Brottier was assigned to the parish in the town of St. Louis, whereas he had dreamt of a rough life in the interior. Welcomed by his parish priest, Fr. Jalabert, later Bishop, he spent himself at his urban apostolate. He turned his attention to the most abandoned of the time, the half-castes. Where many missionaries had despaired of evangelizing them, Fr. Brottier succeeded in convincing his companions there was hope. With youthful vigour he also turned towards the youth, revitalizing apostolic works that had died with the transfer of former priests. He gave weekly instructions to the students of Faidherbe secondary school; he founded a child-aid centre; he published a parish bulletin in 1906 that still appears today under a title he would have liked, "Unite". But the first issue was hardly out when he fell sick and was advised to return to France.

After six months with his family he wondered if God was not calling him to be a Trappist. Nothing came of it and he returned to St. Louis in 1907, where he developed his journalistic talents and organized a band. St. Louis was giving him full scope for priestly and missionary activity; he was creative, enterprising, progressive and disturbing! Prayer sustained all this activity, but his health deteriorated. He had to come home again.

LERINS

A major interlude in his life at this juncture was his stay at the Trappist monastery of the Islands of Lerins. Back in France in June 1911, his old desire to enter a monastery awoke. The following letter reveals his state of soul, torn between contemplative and active life, and his total surrender to God's will.

Paris, 2 November 1911

Dear Martha and Madeleine,

You will probably remember as clearly as I an evening in April 1908 when I told you my intentions of entering the Trappists. You also know how I nourished this in my heart and hoped to follow it up. I made a decision and must tell you about it.

From 20 to 30 September, unknown to Bishop Jalabert and with the sole permission of Archbishop Le Roy, I spent in the Trappist monastery of Lerins in the Mediterranean. I lived unforgettable hours in the recollection of the cloister in an atmosphere of sacrifice and immolation. But the lack of sleep, and especially of food, wore me down and after a few days I had to yield to the evidence: I was not made for this kind of life. I came back to Paris, and now, bravely and without looking back, I face the future whatever it be. There are big question-marks over my return to St. Louis. I have promised to leave all to providence and take no steps, for or against. That is the only way for a religious to do his duty.

D. Brottier

THE AFRICAN MEMORIAL: THE CATHEDRAL AT DAKAR

This enterprise must be looked at in its historical context. Bishop Jalabert's plan could appear "colonial", like building a hospital or a governor general's residence, but his perspective was different. Dakar, of which Jalabert was bishop, was "the daughter of the Holy Ghost Fathers, born in 1846 on the initia-

tive of a young Spiritan, Fr. Arragon; thanks to him the gate to West Africa was opened to the gospel and to France" (from Fr. Yves Pichon's biography of Fr. Brottier). Bishop Jalabert's twofold objective in one operation was to build a fitting place of worship as a cathedral, and a monument of homage to all who gave their energy, blood and life for the sake of Africa, in the service of the African people. Fr. Brottier had just returned to France, forced by poor health to leave Africa for good. The bishop knew Fr. Brottier's potential. He appointed him vicar general of Dakar "residing in Paris" and director of the African Memorial.

Fr. Brottier was enthusiastic that even in France he would be doing a missionary task. He threw all his energy into the new apostolate; he set up a secretariate and a public relations office that offended some of his zealous confreres; he involved lay people; he gave a soul to the work that Christians in France could not ignore. A network of reliable friends took shape that gradually covered all France. He concentrated on the African Memorial for seven years over two periods, 1911-1914 and 1919-1923. It brought out his qualities and virtues providentially; his great faith and missionary spirit mobilized his remarkable human qualities. It challenged him adequately as he brought Bishop Jalabert's dream to a reality. On 2 February 1936 the Dakar cathedral was consecrated by Cardinal Verdier, papal legate. Notably absent from the ceremony was Fr. Brottier himself, who preferred to remain hidden in the hour of glory; instead, he delivered an electrifying address — his last — to his children in Auteuil, who had gathered to honour him that day.

My Children,

I cannot find words to thank you for this surprise today. It is very moving for me. This intimate celebration gives me more joy than had I gone to Dakar with the cardinal. Children, my happiness is rooted in you. When I was beginning twenty-five years of work on the African Memorial, if I had known the joy you would procure me today it would have been enough. People are surprised I did not go to Dakar to receive laurels. I am past the age for human honours; besides, about Dakar, I never thought an instant of human glory. God's love brings events together for his greatest glory. You must know that without Bi-

shop Jalabert and the African Memorial, there would be no chapel to St. Thérèse here today. Nor would I be here with you, dear children. As long as the breath of life lasts we must bless God and sing forever the Lord's mercies.

Fr. Brottier's fine soul shines through this message to his children, twenty-six days before his death: self-effacement, complete abnegation in the light of God's glory alone. He was already living in God.

MILITARY CHAPLAIN

Could it be that the years spent working for the African Memorial sometimes weighed heavily on Fr. Brottier, extraordinary man of action and down-to-earth priest that he was? It entailed long days and nights at a desk, writing, replying all the time, frequent contacts with "important people", from the Duchess of Chartres to the Prince of Aremberg, including Madame Savorgnan de Brazza and General Gourand. Fr. Brottier had made it his duty to alert "all Paris" to his noble work, and Paris responded generously. But this image of Fr. Brottier, tied to the desk or frequenting the salons, is scarcely the one we think of spontaneously. He was made for an "apostolate of contact», both by nature and by his own wish. The 1914-1918 war offered him that field of activity. Eye-witness accounts and stories proliferate about his deeds among his soldiers in open terrain or in the trenches. Perhaps he felt better employed in that situation where risk was daily bread and the sufferings of the poorest were shared. For the fifty-two months of that tragedy he lived with danger. By word and example he brought comfort, he raised morale, he stimulated energies, he received confidences, he prepared people for death. Vulnerable all the time, ignoring danger, he heard and saw everything. In the name of Charity with a capital C he built "bridges" between the troops and the high command and he even changed the mind of a staff officer of the armed forces about the basis for an attack!

His priestly role during these terrible years is expressed in the words he wrote to his brother and sister-in-law on giving them his military chaplain's cross after the war:

Keep it carefully, for it was my silent witness all during the war. How many lips of dying people kissed that cross! It heard the last sighs of innumerable young soldiers. It touched their mangled, shattered bodies. I can declare that if the cord of this cross knew all the blood it drank the water in which it dipped would run red.

The commendations he received are full of the superlatives the army uses; but one of them, that of 29 June 1918, uses an unusual term, it dubs him a "legendary chaplain". A halo of the "marvellous" was enveloping him; everything in his life was "marvellous": Bishop Jalabert, Senegal, the African Memorial, the great war. God was writing straight with crooked lines, down to the thunderclap of Auteuil, still re-echoing.

NATIONAL UNION OF EX-SERVICEMEN

It is hard to be faithful to a chronology in Fr. Brottier's life, so many circumstances overlap. Still a word must be said on the National Union of Ex-Servicemen. He had dreamt of the extraordinary spirit of fraternity born in the course of the war continuing among the former soldiers. He saw the foundation of a wide movement develop. This simple military chaplain, who might be tempted to create "his" association of ex-servicemen along confessional lines, became a forward-looking priest aiming at a national union open to all without distinction. He did not hesitate to involve public powers and he even got access to Clémenceau, then President of the Council. Once again, the driving-force behind his outsize plans was love. The union grew to two million members. Fr. Brottier never did things by halves, it was always "all or nothing".

AUTEUIL

From the moment Bishop Jalabert told him that "Little Sister Thérèse" had protected him during the war, Fr. Brottier sought an occasion to thank her who would become his colleague. He could have lit candles, celebrated Mass, gone on

pilgrimage to Lisieux. No, he would make her a gift according to the greatness of her protection; he watched for signs of providence.

21 November 1923

He went to the heart of things the day he arrived. His visitation took him to the chapel, an old unworthy shed. His immediate reaction was, Auteuil needs a new chapel and it will be dedicated to Thérèse. This would be his gratitude. All he needed was the permission of the Archbishop of Paris. Fr. Brottier's mind and heart moved fast. He would meet the cardinal on 1 December — nine days hence, time for a novena! He spoke to Thérèse:

> **If you want me to build you a chapel, tell me. I am going to ask Cardinal Dubois for the permission. If I come by 10,000 francs before the meeting, I will know you want the chapel. If you do not send it I will not mention the chapel.**

He began the novena, joined by the children's prayers.

The Carmel of Lisieux has recently sent me a copy of a letter Fr. Brottier wrote that very day to the prioress:

Paris, 21 November 1923

Dear Reverend Mother,

Today, feast of our Lady's Visitation, I have taken charge of a work well-known to the Carmel at Lisieux, the orphans of Auteuil. The Archdiocese of Paris asked the Holy Ghost Congregation, and Archbishop Le Roy has given me the responsibility. I want my first action, my first letter, to be for the Carmel of Lisieux for Blessed Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

Dear Reverend Mother, we have met before. I had the honour of seeing you in June 1919 in the parlour during a visit with Bishop Jalabert. I was leaving for Rome soon afterwards and you asked me to take a valuable little parcel to the Carmel in Rome, concerning the beatification of dear Sister Thérèse. Our pilgrimage was in thanksgiving. Bishop Jalabert and I were coming to thank Sister Thérèse for the protection she gave me as a simple military chaplain during the war. Ever since then I have had a special devotion to the Blessed Thérèse. On coming to Auteuil my intention was to place the chil-

dren under her protection, which they now are. I erected a fine statue, and I am told another is coming.

But all that is not enough. I have another idea, on which I need your advice. Our chapel is inadequate and ugly. It cannot serve as a chapel-of-ease for the parish we belong to, as it is situated within the buildings. I would like to build one giving onto the street, spacious and beautiful, serving both the orphans and our neighbourhood, and to dedicate it to Blessed Thérèse. This would be her first sanctuary in Paris. I am sure Blessed Thérèse will love to protect my dear children and receive the homage of the people of Paris, who will flock to this shrine. But I will not start until she herself indicates God's will. That is why I am writing, that you may help me to obtain the sign; and that is why I wanted my first action here to be this letter I address to you in all simplicity and trust.

Little Thérèse will undertake to send us the hundreds of thousands of francs needed. She will also be mother to these poor children entrusted to us and will help us to prepare them for life in the practice of virtue and goodness. We begin a novena to her tomorrow, to finish on 30 November. I dare to ask you and your dear daughters to join us and carry our intention to the feet of the dear Sister.

My respectful thanks, Reverend Mother, for whatever you can do to help us in our task, which you will understand to be delicate and difficult here in the capital city.

D. Brottier

1 December 1923

On the ninth day, as he was leaving for the archbishop's house, a lady handed him an envelope with 10,000 francs! This authentic anecdote was to launch the whole Auteuil enterprise and unlock a flood of spiritual and temporal value whose effects we still feel. Naturally, Cardinal Dubois said yes to the chapel, while not understanding why Fr. Brottier should want to build a place of worship in honour of Thérèse! No matter.

8 December 1923

Fr. Brottier did not let the grass grow under his feet. A week after his visit to the cardinal, the weekly paper published

by the orphans of Auteuil, *La France Illustrée*, launched the first appeal for funds. Within a matter of days the plan met opposition, but heaven visibly intervened to confirm Fr. Brottier in his choice of title, Thérèse. He met M. Castel, who used supply coal to Auteuil; this gentleman was the brother of Sr. Mary of the Trinity, the last novice of Thérèse in the Lisieux Carmel. Fr. Brottier was thrilled to learn that Thérèse in her lifetime had known and loved the children of Auteuil and had prayed for the organization. M. Castel's witness was a trump-card that he used constantly to convince the Friends of Thérèse to build the chapel. The prioress of Carmel allowed Sr. Mary of the Trinity to be godmother of the Auteuil organization. Auteuil was under way. From now on, Thérèse was intimately associated with it and the hand of God was on it. Fr. Brottier's trust, simultaneously blind and lucid, began to flatten mountains. To his virtues were added great human qualities. An indefatigable worker despite atrocious and persistent headaches, a proven organizer, a man of personal relationships endowed with a fertile imagination, he undertook disconcerting enterprises in various domains, even scandalizing some of his friends. Like all who live the gospel to the letter, he was embarrassing! "Ask and you will receive". He took Christ's word to heart and staked all on providence, which accommodated itself to his faith.

Fr. Brottier worked for twelve years at Auteuil, from 1923 to his death in 1936. He had two capital preoccupations, closely linked: 1) to save the poorest and most disadvantaged children; 2) to associate Thérèse of Lisieux with his mission and thereby make known her message of God's love. When he had arrived, the organization was in difficulty. Staff and children were disgruntled and debts were huge. He began by repairing the plumbing, increasing salaries, improving living conditions and generally raising morale. He did not succeed all at once. His council did not understand why, a fortnight after arriving, he should open a subscription campaign, not as a stop-gap but to build a chapel, even if it was in honour of Thérèse — still only beatified, incidentally. "Love tends to be foolish"!

Outside the organization, and even within the Holy Ghost Congregation, his methods appeared irrational, bewildering, bordering on the wrong. They shocked some people. "You would be better employed putting up dormitories and work-

shops rather than a chapel". This was not Fr. Brottier's logic; the heavenly treasurer is different from earthly ones! The appeals for the chapel brought in an avalanche of gifts. A magnificent chain of friendship started that would enable the Auteuil organization to develop prodigiously and save a multitude of children, a chain whose links go on multiplying. The chapel became a source of graces, a spiritual centre for anguished supplications and cries of distress as well as for messages of love and thanksgiving. Then he built reception rooms and professional areas, but the house at 40 Rue La Fontaine did not suffice. He opened houses throughout the country and instituted the association, "Orphans of France", whereby country households took hundreds of children into a family atmosphere to learn a farming trade. For twelve years of frenzied activity he struggled against the encroaches of misery. He kept the Friends of Auteuil informed about his concerns and plans, reminding them that Little Thérèse was involved in his undertakings for the poor. He wrote thousands and thousands of letters that all demonstrated his love of God and his deprived people. It has been said that he was a businessman. True, but his was the "business of providence", he was "heaven's businessman". But his successes never went to his head. His fervent life of prayer, sustained in permanent converse with God, kept him humble and self-forgetful; that was his "success".

The doctors are trying to find the cause of my sickness. If they knew all the misery that knocks on my door and my powerlessness to deal with it, they would know what is breaking me today.

This was one of his last statements. He had doubled the intake of children in twelve years and was still not satisfied. He fell sick on 2 February 1936, the very day of the consecration of the cathedral at Dakar. He died on the 28th. 15,000 people filed past his remains before the funeral service conducted by Cardinal Verdier.

Fr. Brottier's work did not finish with his life, but developed in unlikely ways. Fr. Marc Duval, his second successor, opened sixteen houses! Today the Auteuil organization numbers 3,400 children and youths. The disturbing question is, are we faithful to it all? Little Thérèse and Fr. Brottier gave the bad habit of miracles to those working at Auteuil! A daily miracle is hard to manage, yet it happens. The twenty-five

houses of Auteuil train 3,400 boys in trades. There are 1,300 men and women to educate them, as well as the inevitable administration. 60% of the budget is always in doubt. Auteuil is a challenge to the most elementary rules of management.

Why this permanent miracle, why God's solicitude for Auteuil? To show the intercessory power of Thérèse and Fr. Brottier in a mission situation, on the limits of the spiritual desert. Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of the missions, and Daniel Brottier, missionary to the fingertips, are at home in this field of activity and know God's free gifts. They ask us to receive the poorest with open arms, the most deprived, those nobody wants. Are we fulfilling their expectations? One certitude remains. We at Auteuil know in all honesty that God's mercy is in inverse proportion to our merits.

Jean Gosselin
Director General of the Auteuil Organization
28 February 1984

THE MAN WHOM GRACE TURNED INTO A SAINT

"It has been said that I am lucky", Fr. Brottier confided to his friend and colleague, Fr. Yves Pichon.

Yes, it is true. God has blessed me, he has given me the satisfaction of succeeding in what I undertook; but if, thanks be to God, I have been so lucky I can say with some modern writer or other that ‹my luck has been to rise at five every morning and retire at eleven or even midnight›. My luck has been to work, to write thousands of letters, to try new initiatives, to be in the thick of things, in full tilt, availing of opportunities.

The basic image of Fr. Brottier's personality is one of exceptional richness at the service of a supernatural conviction capable of surmounting all obstacles.

A RESOLUTE SPIRIT

We are dealing with someone who was feeling anything but guilty before an immense task. He took everything seriously, dedicating himself to the limit of his powers, but with a sort of quiet strength that had its source in his psychic balance and unshakable faith in God. "Your heart is worn out", the doctors told him on his deathbed. He answered: "My job is over; God, your will be done". His resolute spirit was his strength as a young man — his missionary vocation had shown itself at twelve. It sustained him in his studies despite the precocious phenomenon of headaches. A priest who knew him when he was entering the seminary described him. "A wide-awake student, hardy, resolute, sure of himself". He went on to the senior seminary of Blois, was ordained for the diocese and received his first appointment as dean of studies in the college of Pontlevoy. He met the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in the infirmary where his frail health made him a reg-

ular client. Conversation turned to the missions, Senegal, Guiana, the Congo. The missionary flame was ignited. At the end of August 1902, aged 26, he entered the Holy Ghost novitiate, knowing he could not prolong his family's pain at the news that he was going to the missions. His resolution was firm, even at the obvious risk of an early death.

Yet his determination was sorely tried. His family had accepted his vocation to be a diocesan priest; their son would be nearby, a certain security was guaranteed. Daniel realized the difficulty of parting and wrote about it to his future master of novices. "I never knew it was so complicated to leave the world". He had foreseen his mother's objections and prepared his answers, but his father was more categoric. "Have you thought about your health? Your broad shoulders give the impression of strength, and yet look at all the doctors we had to bring you to, the headaches since you were a child, that nothing can take away. It is folly to go out; you will get sick and have to come back. If you do go, it is against my formal will".

OVERFLOWING ZEAL

Fr. Brottier was appointed to Senegal, which at that time was reserved for the more frail; missionaries died there less quickly than in the Congo or Ubangi-Shari. Once he had arrived, his zeal knew no bounds: meetings, talks, sports, band, parish bulletin. In less than three years his bad health forced him back to France. But when he returned to Africa after a break he resumed his life of activity, sustained by a brilliant imagination and all kinds of talents. In the midst of it came the desire to be a Trappist. After a short trial he had to abandon this, even if the pull to contemplative life made itself felt from time to time later.

Between 1903 and 1911 he spent only short periods overseas. Finally the doctors decided he must stay in France. A Sister who knew him in Senegal said: "Despite his many occupations, cares and problems, he was by no means sad or morose. No, he was bright and open, with the ready word to make people laugh. Yet he suffered, God sent him trials and troubles. Like all those who want to do good, he knew the value of generosity, sacrifice and self-forgetfulness". The

missionary was back home. Known now for his many qualities, his liveliness and apostolic dynamism, he would make solid friendships like that of his bishop, Bishop Jalabert, who appreciated him. Fr. Brottier was to spend himself for Bishop Jalabert, gathering funds for the cathedral of Dakar. Other friendships among the French soldiers at St. Louis would help towards the future National Union of Ex-Servicemen, to be initiated by himself, and towards the organization of the orphan-apprentices of Auteuil. His short stay in Africa sowed rich seed that would produce a hundredfold.

THE MAN OF DANGER

For health reasons Fr. Brottier was not mobilized when the first world war broke out. But he enlisted with a group of voluntary chaplains, and went on to show courage and legendary dedication in the face of danger, giving of himself with a sort of fury. Soldiers would say to him, "Father, near you we feel sheltered; shells just go through you". We do not intend to recount this capital episode of his life in detail but only to look at the moral greatness of our confrere. Two mentions in despatches will suffice. The first is of November 1917: "Legendary chaplain of the 121st infantry regiment, for his calm and quiet bravery, his scorn of danger, his extraordinary spirit of dedication and self-sacrifice. He has spent himself in all circumstances and under the most violent bombardments to bring the comfort of his presence and needed aid to the wounded. Highly esteemed and admired by all the regiment". The second is of June 1918: "A magnificent soul in whom the soldier's ardour and the priest's dedication combine. Legendary in the regiment whose difficult moments he shares. During the attacks of June 1 and 2, 1918 at Troesnes, he went through the lines lifting, bandaging and helping the wounded, seeking them out in the front lines under the intense fire of the cannons and encouraging the soldiers. . . Exercises the greatest influence on the soldiers, whom he sustains morally in their difficult hours by his encouragement and example".

These were dreadful years, of which he would say later: "It was a hard apprenticeship; but now it is over and I am hardened to war for all time".

He did not want the bond of friendship that had grown between the soldiers to dissolve. Astonishingly bold when something seemed right to him, he did not hesitate to meet the head of government in person — a noted anti-clerical — to outline his plan on a national level: to create an association of ex-servicemen. "Your idea is excellent", said the statesman, "I fully approve and encourage you". This was the birth of the National Union of Ex-Servicemen, with the motto, "United as at the Front".

Memories of the war would follow him all his life, but the frightful situations he had met did not alter that tenderness of heart that would make him still more legendary in the service of the orphan-apprentices of Auteuil. Providentially death had spared him, but the daily deaths of others affected his character sufficiently to be able to transform a moribund house into a thriving institution.

A VALUED COUNCILLOR

It was not that Fr. Brottier had totally committed himself to activity. Twice he had felt called to be a Trappist — in Senegal in 1908 and then in France in 1912. These were signs of his passionate love for God, constantly seeking his will, a guarantee of the prudence of his actions, whether on his own behalf or for one of his many visitors. This outstanding prudence would inspire the Congregation to call him, despite his overload of work, to the post of assistant general. He did not look for it; he even sent his doctor and friend to Archbishop Le Hunsec, the superior general, to dissuade him. Back came the reply: "In appointing him to the Council the Fathers want above all to be able to benefit from his wide experience in the thorny questions that arise".

One of the remarkable instances of his supernatural prudence was the idea from the moment of his appointment — forty-eight hours after he was installed — that a new chapel should be built at Auteuil consecrated to her who was still only Blessed Thérèse of Lisieux. Wise people tried to dissuade him, some blamed him outright for big ideas. He attributed the miraculous protection of his life to her whom the English-speaking soldiers called "The Little Flower". After the war he had said to his former bishop of Dakar how sur-

prised he was to have escaped so many mortal dangers. The bishop took a picture of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus from his breviary, to which he had attached a photo of Fr. Brottier and the prayer, "Little Sister Thérèse, keep Fr. Brottier safe for me". "Every night", said the bishop, "I begged her to save you; she worked the miracle"

BOLDNESS

In building the chapel Fr. Brottier was also guaranteeing a mother for his orphans, and he launched into what all saw as an adventure. His supernatural boldness asked for signs from his protectress, visible and tangible ones. His trust in God was the support for his boldness, it would be artificial to separate them. "His life was an unending miracle", said one of his colleagues. It is a fact that while the chapel was being built, that is, 1924-5, he received daily by mail or in the offerings-box or from anonymous donors a thousand-franc note that he felt certain came from St. Thérèse. This sign urged him on. One evening about 9 p.m. he said to Fr. Yves Pichon, "I did not receive the usual money today; look in the offerings-box in the chapel, it may be there". Sure enough it was, so badly inserted in the slot that anyone could have taken it. Another evening after prayers: "I did not receive the money today; watch what happens". A lady arrived and offered him an envelope, asking for prayers for her father. It contained the thousand francs. Further anecdotes confirmed the aura of the miraculous surrounding him. Cardinal Verdier of Paris said, "Whenever I see Fr. Brottier I seem to see him in a halo of light".

A HEART OF FIRE

He looked on the chapel of St. Thérèse as the soul and focus of the Auteuil organization. It was a means at the service of the goal: to accept orphan children. This was his permanent concern. He wrote more than 180 articles in *La France Illustrée*, which was edited by himself, as many in the organization's *Newsletter*, thousands of letters — some days as many as 200 — all to defend the sacred cause, under the

triptych: Open the door to them, give them bread, give them a trade. He wrote in the *Newsletter* of January-February 1925:

> **‹Bread for the orphans› is a father's cry who cannot make ends meet. Bread costs 1F 40. Mothers of families, you know what it costs to feed three or four mouths a day. What would it be if you multiplied by 300? Do you understand our cry of distress?**
> **Friends of Auteuil, must we stop taking in little children who will never receive their first holy communion? These unfortunate boys are deprived of family help and affection, must we leave them on the streets, leave them to vice and misery? What is given to the unfortunate on earth will be rewarded by God in heaven.**

One day the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, impressed by criticisms levelled against the advertizing used by Fr. Brottier, and worried by the very development of the house, said to him: "Father, it seems you are letting yourself be carried away. People are talking about the considerable capital you use for new buildings, and I hear reports that you keep the doors open daily to new orphans. It has dangers. I know it would be cruel to refuse the unfortunate, but I have the duty to remind you to be prudent". The conversation took place at the orphanage. Just then a poorly clad woman with emaciated face entered. "Father, I am a widow, sick and penniless. Tomorrow I go into hospital for a big operation. My twelve year old son may find himself without a family. Will you take him?" The woman looked from one priest to the other, not realizing one of them was the archbishop. "Madam", said Fr. Brottier, "it is for the cardinal, not for me, to decide your son's fate". The cardinal started, hesitated, then said, "Yes, Madam, Fr. Brottier will take your child".

When Fr. Brottier arrived on 21 November 1923 there were 170 orphan-apprentices; there were 300 in 1930, 400 in 1932, 500 in 1933, 700 in 1934 and 1000 in 1935. A year later, at his death, there were 1400. The figure kept on increasing, it is over 3,000 now, with the added complications of diverse origin and culture, due to the many races represented, from Asian refugees to the socially maladjusted; some houses also accept the mentally handicapped.

A MODERN "SAINT"

How did this growth take place? The new director in 1923 introduced himself calmly. Speaking to the staff, he declared:

> **This is no novice taking charge. Those who see him know that the years in Africa and in the war have put their hard mark on his appearance. But that is secondary. What only counts, dear friends, is that you find in me, as you did in the last four directors of Auteuil, good will, a great longing to be of use to you at a moment none too propitious.**

Since the end of the war Fr. Brottier had been collecting money for the cathedral of Dakar. He had put his whole heart into that. Now he was offered a new appointment. That too he accepted and welcomed with the same self-dedication. He wrote:

> **To serve means to get outside oneself, to be one's own no more. It almost means to have no rights, only duties. It means to have no self-interest, to sacrifice everything to the general interest. It is to think, will and act for the good of others. It is to live, and sometimes to die, for the well-being of all, out of love for God.**

His way was to take decisions — some would call it rashness. He was convinced he was doing missionary work. St. Thérèse was committed on her part by her promise to shower roses from heaven after she died. So he gave himself over to working for the orphans, becoming attached to the boys and what families they had. His bulletin hammered home the motto, "Open the gates to them". His biographer, Fr. Pichon, said in the depositions for his beatification: "I often met him crying as he left his office at night, when he would say with sadness, See, I had to refuse a hundred more orphans today; I have nowhere to put them; isn't it dreadful?"

TIRELESS LETTER-WRITER

St. Thérèse's shower of roses did not turn sufficiently into a flood of banknotes, despite Fr. Brottier's campaigning ge-

nius and conviction. The demand exceeded the supply. Thousands of letters, articles in *La France Illustrée* and the organization's *Newsletter,* lavish ceremonies in honour of St. Thérèse at which tens of thousands of Parisians came to pray under the leadership of famous bishops — all human means were pressed into the service of the organization that had the triple goal of making good Christians, good workers and good citizens. On occasion the spiritual state of his charges disturbed him. He opened his heart to his chaplains: "When we examine the results so far we must admit they are modest enough; religiously, we are not raising our children high". The chaplains countered that levels were low everywhere in such institutions, and that the handicap of orphans from poor families added complications. For material development he obtained the collaboration of an engineer of the polytechnic school to modernize the workshops, multiply the trades, improve the quality of teaching techniques and professional training. The organization has kept up its tradition and reputation in industrial circles ever since. At his death the foundations were well laid and Auteuil had become known. As he said himself: "I could disappear any day. The future can be faced calmly, for I have created around our orphans a network of friendships and dedication that I consider indestructible".

* * *

These few characteristics, taken basically from Fr. Pichon's *Life* of Fr. Brottier, will help to sketch the moral portrait of our confrere. What must be borne in mind is that the mainspring of his life was nothing other than complete trust in God and in the organization's protectress, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Union with God is the soul of the apostolate.

Jean P. Le Gall, C.S.Sp.
Former Director General of the Auteuil Organization

THE HEART OF AUTEUIL

Our superior general, Fr. Frans Timmermans, invited me to come and work at Auteuil with Mr. Jean Gosselin, the director general. I remember the day easily, 11 February 1976, as St. Bernadette Soubirous is one of my favourite Saints; like many of our young people at Auteuil, Bernadette was marked by difficulties in her family. Besides, two months earlier, I had attended a vocations meeting at Nevers. Someone had persuaded me to go and pray before St. Bernadette's shrine, a thing not greatly to my taste. But God was waiting to give me a friend in the communion of Saints. Before that emaciated corpse I was overcome. Yes, Bernadette was indeed the sister of the children we take in. It was no chance that her physique was poor and that she died a martyr to asthma. God had loved her first, for he exalts the humble. One of the aspects of Auteuil became clear for the first time: through Fr. Roussel's and Fr. Brottier's work God was crying out to the world of today that he loves the poor, the most abandoned, the disinherited. How otherwise account for the unfailing help God gives it?

* * *

I soon discovered other aspects I had known only superficially before. Although I had lived eight years at Château des Vaux, our largest house, where I had looked after a missionary group, I knew nothing of Auteuil's finances. I was flabbergasted. How could the treasurer sleep at all? Only 40% of our needed resources were assured for the upkeep of our twenty-five houses, to feed, warm, train 3,400 young people and pay 1,300 people in their service. We had no capital. The Lord had to send us 60% of our expenses daily. Yet daily, monthly, yearly, our expenses were always covered, including the unforeseen and unforeseeable investments like burst boilers or written-off cars. There are plenty of unforeseen factors in twenty-five houses of youngsters! I recalled an

event from childhood. During a retreat I read the life of Fr. Cottolengo of Turin and was amazed at this priest who counted on God alone to feed his 2,000 people in hospitals. One unforgettable detail for me at the age of twelve was that each night he would open his window and empty out his money-drawer onto the street, so as not to be lacking in trust in him who feeds the birds of the air! But here in front of my eyes was the same act of providence towards the poorest: our 3,000 boys fed, instructed, trained, thanks to the gifts of our friends in heaven and on earth. We did not empty the cash-box out the window but, without capital, always unsure for tomorrow, like men of little faith, as Jesus would say, we saw money coming in, just enough to pay debts and calm the storms of our debtors.

I admit the first months intrigued me. Fr. Brottier was famous throughout France but I did not see God helping us that much. Yet, already at Château des Vaux, God had been showing me the light. Fr. Lucien Rozo, former provincial of France, became religious superior at Auteuil, then went to live at 40 Rue La Fontaine, where he replied to the letters. He read out some for me: moving, full of faith, from people in dire straits, asking Fr. Brottier's and St. Thérèse's help. I quoted them regularly in our missionary group, to help us to pray for the Friends of Auteuil. But now I was reading the incoming mail myself, getting to know Auteuil in the raw. Thérèse of Lisieux, whom Fr. Brottier had chosen as patron of his orphans in November 1923, showed up everywhere. All the letters, sometimes *hundreds*, spoke of her. People invoked her, recommended various intentions, thanked her. Her name and Fr. Brottier's were linked as colleagues to solicit impossible requests from heaven.

From the start Fr. Brottier had thought only of Thérèse. Faced with the task of re-launching Fr. Roussel's great work, he had requested the children's prayers for nine days for an unnamed favour. When you come to Auteuil, look at the large stained-glass window in the transept over our Lady's altar, right beside his grave. The inscription reads: "1 December 1923 his Eminence Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, gave permission for the building of this sanctuary dedicated to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus". In other words, nine days after arriving in Auteuil, Fr. Brottier had his permission to build the first *chapel* in Christendom *dedicated* to St. Thérèse

of Lisieux, and had taken this Saint as patron of his orphans. I love his reply to the cardinal, who thought a young girl was not the best patron for his urchins. "Maybe my boys will not think about her but she will think about them!" From that on he dedicated himself to Thérèse's cause, making her known and loved, first by the people of Paris and then by all of France. He wrote in the editorial of *La France Illustrée*, 6 November 1926:

> **In the right transept of our chapel, artists have reproduced a moment of history in stained glass. On 1 December 1923 the director of the Auteuil organization obtained permission from his Eminence, Cardinal Dubois, to build the chapel and consecrate it to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The archbishop is shown kneeling, holding in his hands the model of Thérèse's chapel, surrounded by young first communicants and the teacher who prepared them; then Fr. Roussel, humbly kneeling behind the cardinal, then Canons Fontaine, Blétit and Muffat, and the present director behind them. Our Lady of First Communion is seated, the Child Jesus on her kness stretching out his hands towards the communicants to receive their homage. A flight of angels around and above the monstrance shining in golden light recalls that all these religious gestures move towards the sacred Host and that Thérèse will use this sanctuary, as she wrote herself, to make Love loved.**

The weekly *La France Illustrée* was launched by Fr. Roussel in 1874 to advertize the Auteuil organization. Fr. Brottier began using it to make Thérèse known. Between 1 December 1923 and 29 October 1927 all his editorials without exception spoke of her and her sanctuary. He kept the subscribers on their toes with graphs of subscriptions, lists to be filled, weekly information on the state of the work. The editorial of 6 July 1924 announced the laying of the first stone, 6 September the opening of the foundations, 29 September the plan of the new basilica. He showed contagious enthusiasm for Thérèse. It can be said today, re-reading the lists of subscriptions, that he had mobilized the whole of France to offer the young Carmelite of Lisieux her sanctuary in Paris. On 25 October he spoke of his real reason for the choice — it was

that he was miraculously preserved during the four years of the great war, 1914-1918, by Thérèse. This chapel of thanksgiving would be the sign and instrument of a genuine Christian training, the first and essential goal of Fr. Roussel.

But Fr. Brottier would also make Thérèse known through his correspondence. He replied to thousands of letters of benefactors and created a goodwill network to sustain the organization. His pen has been preserved. I have often looked at it. The thought that he would write 100 letters a day makes my fingers tingle on my own fountain-pen. It was a feat, and I understand why today correspondents send me his handwriting, letters addressed to them, like one recently from the altar-boy of 1908 at St. Louis in Senegal, or letters addressed to parents and grandparents of my correspondents.

The whole Auteuil organization resembles an iceberg. The visible part is twenty-five houses, 3,500 young people and 1,300 adults serving them. The invisible part is the thousands of people out there who are friends of Thérèse and Fr. Brottier. In the communion of Saints all these friends constitute a vast power of prayer and intercession that explains the unlikely. Thanks to them, the needed money comes to us daily. And there are other results more important for the survival of the spiritual work of Fr. Roussel and Fr. Brottier. For example, as the administration of houses passed into lay hands there was danger that the work might lose its primary meaning, but that did not happen. Providence saw to it that each time men and women were chosen who kept the founders' spirit, without cleaving to sterile traditions. Again, the temptation was strong to take in only good students, orderly quiet boys with good connections; on the contrary, influenced by the Holy Spirit, the directors continue to receive the poorest.

The main house, at 40 Rue La Fontaine, Paris, sheltered 340 young boys of thirty-two different nationalities during 1982-83! The director knows this is too many, it is unreasonable, but, face to face with certain situations, his heart accords what his reason refuses! For example, two youngsters of fourteen and fifteen arrived, one black and one white, who had simply read Fr. Brottier's life and seen the Auteuil address. Another boy just brought his brother to the gate and presented him. Another fourteen-year old orphan was taken

by friends to Paris and placed into Auteuil; tears first, then calm and settling down. That is Auteuil today.

A moot point in our liberal world is how to present the faith to the young people we receive. I know our poverty in this area, and far be it from me to give rise to false optimism! God clearly sends us many men and women of solid and contagious faith who are examples to the young. It is humble work. We remember the grain growing of itself once God has sown it with our good-will, and we remember the darnel growing with the wheat. We rush to pull out the darnel and are upset by the Lord's patience and tolerance. We would only destroy the garden.

I once spent a while with a group of eight adults on the Island of Reunion, a group called "Awakening the Faith". They speak to young people about religion. Veronica opened the meeting with a meditation on our Lady's Assumption for 15 August.

"Mary lived in a simple house at Nazareth. With her husband she recited the words every morning: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and you shall love your neighbour as yourself for love of God". Then she set to the day's work, for her husband was a poor workman, joiner, wheelwright, carpenter as needs were. Mary did the household jobs, tired at the end of the day. She had gathered diamonds where others gather pebbles (valueless acts). Her judgement was a triumph, the crowning of a meritorious life".

Obviously Veronica's own spiritual life enabled her to help on the grain and stifle the darnel. The great prayers of our friends, as they come across in the letters to Auteuil, obtain the same for us. This is Auteuil's heart and strength.

* * *

It remains for me to give some extracts from these letters, one better than the other. In 1976, 1,000 letters a day were arriving, and instead of decreasing this number has increased to 2,000 a day and sometimes more. Nothing explains Auteuil except God's mercy to the most unfortunate, the spiritually deprived, that mercy that St. Thérèse of Lisieux made the centre of her message. The letters present a striking ana-

logy to the psalms, as I often realize when saying the liturgy of the hours. The psalms are cries of the Holy Spirit, who used the poor of Israel as harps, singing or sighing according as those people were filled with pain, anguish, or joy, hope and love. Only God could inspire them, rough prayers, cries of people facing the worst: suffering, illness, death. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" was Jesus' cry from the cross. We find similarities in the letters to Auteuil, psalms of the twentieth century.

* * *

Psalm 68: Worn out with calling, my throat is hoarse; my eyes are strained, looking for my God.

This is a cry of desperation. My son, divorced, has taken to drink and lost his job. Pray that Fr. Brottier and St. Thérèse will give him the will to live and the faith to find a more balanced life.

* * *

Psalm 110: I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart. The works of Yahweh are sublime, those who delight in them are right to fix their eyes on them.

Send me a picture of Fr. Brottier. I was brought up to love that holy man. I am twenty-seven, I have a good job and I say that without people like you life would lose a fundamental dimension.

* * *

Psalm 90: I rescue all who cling to me, I protect whoever knows my name, I answer everyone who invokes me, I am with them when they are in trouble.

A road accident at nineteen had made me a difficult person. My family thought I would never get out of the nightmare. I wanted to die. Then my mother asked you there to pray for me. When the novena started I felt inexplicably better. At twenty I am out of the tunnel, thanks to Fr. Brottier and St. Thérèse, and glad to be alive. Thank you.

* * *

Psalm 83: God is battlement and shield. Yahweh withholds nothing good from those who walk without blame.

After a long illness, two years of agony and terrible suffering, my dear husband has died. He never rebelled or despaired. He kept the faith and called on Fr. Brottier and St. Thérèse. He offered his sufferings for others. I will always have full trust in Fr. Brottier.

* * *

Psalm 39: I waited and waited for Yahweh, now at last he has stooped to me and heard my cry for help.

Traumatically affected by her father's second marriage Brigitte fled to the West Indies. For thirteen years I prayed to Fr. Brottier every day for her to come back. She returned on 24 September, in good form and happy to find her family again. Thank you, Fr. Brottier.

* * *

Psalm 33: They cry for help and Yahweh hears and rescues them from all their troubles.

Fr. Brottier helped my seventeen-year old son to die well, worthily, saintly. This is my greatest consolation in my sorrow.

* * *

Psalm 69: To me, poor wretch, come quickly, God! My helper, my saviour, Yahweh, come without delay!

My daughter committed suicide twelve years ago. Now my grown son is depressed. My husband has left me. I am alone with my pain. Do you understand my misery? I feel stupefied. I expect the worst, but I do not know how. Fr. Brottier, help me, I beg you!

* * *

Here in Auteuil itself we meet hard things too. One of our students was killed on Holy Thursday 1983 at fifteen and a half while he was robbing a shop. He had been six months in one of our houses, yet we could not prevent him from violence and death. His family belonged to that fourth world among the high-rise flats, under their shadow. Two million people live like that among us, the fourth world; they eat a quarter of what we do, they live four in a room if not in a bed. Their violence is born of trying to be like us. The Mass for Raymond was moving. All the boys were attentive and quiet, even if the mystery of Christ was partly hidden from them. After the Mass a fifteen-year old Algerian gave me a rose from the altar; he had been Raymond's best friend.

* * *

I will finish on an optimistic note about grace bearing fruit. One of our former students is regularly in prison. He was condemned for a serious crime on 15 December 1981. Through a priest, God touched his heart and he was converted. He wrote:

"A choir came to sing at the prison on Christmas Day. I could not see but only hear them. I was deeply moved, sad and happy at the same time. I was transferred to another prison and condemned to six years of hard labour and solitude. In my cell I had holy pictures of Christ, of Fr. Brottier and of Fr C. I went to bed and said the beads the chaplain had given me, so as not to despair. The six years do not frighten me any more, the love of Christ is with me". On the last Sunday of September 1983 this young man was baptized in the chapel of his former home of Auteuil, after two years of preparation. His joy and happiness were transparent, fruit of all the prayers offered for Auteuil. Nothing is stronger than prayer.

Fr. Gabriel David, C.S.Sp.
Assistant Director General of Auteuil

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF FATHER LIBERMANN

"We do not want weak souls in this totally apostolic Congregation" (Fr. Libermann, N.D. I 662).

Daniel Brottier entered the Holy Ghost Congregation at the age of twenty-seven, after three years of priestly ministry in his native diocese, Blois, not far from the château of Chambord, one of the finest of the Loire valley. His call to missionary work coincided with his call to the priesthood, that is, from infancy. He wrote to Archbishop Le Roy, then superior general of the Holy Ghost Congregation:

> **From the age of twelve I have always envisaged missionary life, and I still do, as the life of one who is prepared to offer and sacrifice all for the salvation of souls — whether quickly or drop by drop, what does it matter? If I may state my preference it would be for the former. I have no wish to be presumptuous, but if you have a dangerous post where someone has to be risked I say in all simplicity, I am ready.**
> His generous magnanimity was already evident.

"I think that all those who seem ready to give themselves to God in this holy work will be disposed for everything" (N.D. I 662).

Daniel Brottier wrote to Fr. Genoud, his master of novices, some time before entering the novitiate:

> **I did not think leaving the world was so complicated. It looks nothing when others are making the sacrifice. Once it touches you personally it is a different matter and appears in another light. My consolation is that I feel the same enthusiasm in my heart. I hasten to take my place among the workers in the Father's huge field. As I am under no illusions about the amount of work I can do and the limited energy I have for it, at least I long to offer my life, my blood, to**

spread the good news. I am convinced that the gospel will not be spread among the pagans except as it was in the early centuries. The seed will have to be watered with the blood of martyrs. Oh, if God would only accept my blood for this task, I would give it with a good heart. The desire for martyrdom is ambitious, but there cannot be a genuine missionary vocation without it.

"The special end the Congregation is founded for is the salvation of the neediest and most abandoned souls" (N.D. X 451).

At the time he landed in Africa, in Senegal, Fr. Brottier was a gentle giant, of majestic appearance, his flourishing beard already whitening, his smile affectionate and cajoling, his glace penetrating and deep, at times exhibiting a leader's authority, at times a father's goodness. "This priest had two souls", said a religious Sister who knew him well. The Blacks and half-castes at St. Louis, the tough soldiers at the front, the orphans at Auteuil — these were the humble ones the Lord was entrusting to him. "An epic in three melodies", said Canon Coubé of him: African missionary, military chaplain, father of orphans.

"The soul, source and nourishment of true zeal is a pure, holy, burning love of God, deeply engrained in the heart" (N.D. X 509).

Daniel Brottier's manifest characteristic was zeal. From the moment he reached Africa he gained notoriety for febrile activity in the most varied areas. Retiring late at night, rising early in the morning, he was called to order more than once by his bishop and friend, Bishop Jalabert. If he did not learn the Wolof language it was because he was overburdened with ministry that was supposed to be temporary — a temporary that lasts, as is common among Spiritans! At the war front, as a voluntary chaplain in the infantry, always in the first wave of assaults, he showed, in his own words, "a superhuman abnegation and bravery". He would say later:

If I had to do again what I did at Verdun and the Somme, I could not. I could no longer carry the wounded on my back, remain days and nights in holes

of trees under deafening bombardments, smile and joke when one is stupefied by cold, tiredness, sleep and fear. All that is superhuman.

Heroes appear in such circumstances. He had a high conception of the priest's role in the first line of infantrymen, sharing their existence, privations, dangers, witnessing to his faith and awakening theirs, sustaining their morale and helping them to die as Christians, never wishing to be elsewhere than where the rank and file were most vulnerable.

His breath-taking activity at Auteuil is well known; here is his apostrophe to his inkwell:

Do you see this inkwell? It has collected more than twenty-five million francs. I made no speeches, I did no visiting, I did not queue up for audiences, but I wrote 30, 50, 80, 100 letters a day, sometimes 200. I answered everyone who wrote, everyone without exception. I thanked each of those who sent an offering, either for the cathedral at Dakar or for my orphans. When I received a ten-cent stamp I used it to send the answer and my thanks. This technique succeeded.

The source and nourishment of this unflagging zeal was his love of God. All who knew him are unanimous, he was "a man of God", devoured by God's love. Some Spiritans who knew him well may be quoted.

Bishop Gay: "He did not see the Auteuil organization as a philanthropic work. It flowed from his love of God, just as his missionary desire and his stay in Africa were not a sort of adventure but flowed from his love of God. Likewise his role as military chaplain, his dedication to the fighting soldiers, are explained by his love of God, driving him on to save souls".

Fr. Pichon, his immediate colleague from 1923 to 1936: "Fr. Brottier had a devotion to abandoned souls; in this he was a worthy member of the Holy Ghost Congregation. When some of our confreres seemed to find that Auteuil was not within the scope of our Congregation he replied that, on the contrary, we should dedicate ourselves to the abandoned souls of the orphans as well as to the Black races of Africa. Faith inspired him. His outstanding devotion was the Sacred Heart, especially Christ's love for us. He lived in the presence of God. Many times he said, When I have an important deci-

sion to take, I pray; I am sure God helps me, and when I speak I really speak in his presence".

Fr. Rigault: "His love for God, yes, that was his master quality and source of all the rest. Because he was a holy friend of God he was charitable to all his brothers, especially the "blessed" poor and gentle, and the victims of injustice — the little ones. Why a whole life of duty and sacrifice? Because he thought only of serving and loving God in solacing human misery. He said, I seek only God's glory; as long as God is satisfied and souls are saved, what does the rest matter? I do not work for myself".

He had the faith to move mountains and warmly transmitted this trust in providence:

> **Never doubt providence, but pray and act; that levels mountains.**
> **Never rush providence. At times we do not understand what is going on, until one day we see that providence was working for the best.**
> **When some business becomes muddled, gain time and let providence take its due course.**
> **When you are hesitating on a line of action to follow, ask a sign of providence; a sincere request will always receive an answer.**
> **As long as we are able to say to God, ‹I took in these unfortunate children out of love for you, help me now to train them›, be certain that providence will step in; whereas if we tried to tailor the admissions to the resources available we would meet unpleasant surprises.**
> **In cases of failure: ‹God did not want it; it is not his moment; we will have to wait›.**

He often asked for signs, either directly from God or from St. Thérèse; to receive some heartened him to ask for more. Faced with a new project or idea, he would say, "I will think about it". That meant, I will pray, or await a sign. But in the meantime he would undertake the work of prudent research and ample consultation.

The habit of living in God's presence led him, like the Curé d'Ars, to think he was called to contemplative life. He stayed only a fortnight at the Trappist monastery of Lérins. "The life of solitude is excellent but is not for me. I left it with a gasp

of relief, for it was not my vocation". The providential sign in this case was hunger! He was hungry all the time he was there.

"The principle of all our conduct towards the souls to whom we are sent will be a tender, strong and compassionate love, a burning desire to procure their salvation and sanctify them" (N.D. X 515).

Fr. Brottier's great charity shone forth visibly in his life, the concrete expression of his love for God. "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25 : 40). His parishioners at St. Louis were used to seeing him mobbed by groups of youngsters, as much at ease in religious instruction as in directing a choir, in a kitchen as in a plantation. The outsize "Brottier-mango" that he grafted is still famous! Always in the breach at the service of all! This description also fitted his ministry as chaplain on the field of battle. He was a ray of sunshine by his joyfulness, his never-failing goodness, his warm interest in everyone, especially the outcasts. He would say, "Goodness dilates the heart, opening it as a refuge for all sufferings". Canon Jamot testified: "I can say he always edified me by his zeal and amazed me by his energy. He always wanted to bring souls closer to God. Fr. Brottier was the most priestly priest I met at the front during the war. Yet he would be swallowing a boxful of aspirins a day for his headache. But I never heard him complain. He would say, This work must be got through today".

His burning love for people was most pronounced at Auteuil. He explained it to a colleague:

> **What better life could you wish for a priest than the life we live here? Look, we spend the whole day doing what? Practising the virtue of charity. From morning to night, what do we do? Receive people in pain, encourage and help them, give them hope; receive orphans, clothe and feed them and give them beds, shelter them from want, train and catechize them, make good Christians out of them; serve as go-betweens for the unemployed to get them work; intercede with the civil, military or religious authorities for families or people in straits; enlighten and guide wav-**

ering souls looking for the right path; visit and console the sick and reconcile them with God; pray and get our children to pray for the thousand and one miseries we hear about; give a service to all, sometimes the rich more than the poor. What is all that, indeed, if not a perpetual exercise of charity? No, believe me, we have chosen the better part, or rather the good God has chosen it for us and we should thank him profusely. To live as Christ lived, is that not, for a priest, the way of perfection?

His exquisite politeness, courtesy and distinguished appearance revealed a great goodness, especially in the last years of his life.

I became angry once, and the consequences were so regrettable that I swore to God I would never get angry again. To be good means to be self-possessed in the details of life, to reflect before replying or taking a decision. The greatest strength is to succeed in refraining from anger.

His goodness hinged on an innate sense of justice. His first move at Auteuil was to raise the salaries of the employees. He would say, "For each to have his due, more than his due must be given him". He improved the food and clothing of the orphans as well. He made in clear that it was preferable to exaggerate on the side of generosity so as not to fail in justice. He would say, "To command well one must be prepared to carry out the order oneself".

These qualities, along with his own natural bearing of authority, made him a peerless educator. He has often been compared to Don Bosco. Goodness and fairness, an alliance difficult to achieve, were the hallmark of his genius. He combined esteem, affection, respect for freedom with the demands he made on the children, no matter what their family or social background. He acknowledged their dignity as sons of God.

If we want to succeed at Auteuil, we must dedicate ourselves to these children wholeheartedly and unreservedly. I have offered myself to God to serve them until death. I desire no other job, I want to die here in their service.

Those who come to live with us must be happy.

The children must feel that I know what they are doing and that I follow them up affectionately.
Let the children be treated without harshness, always with justice. Prefer rewards to punishments.
Let them not have to complain about food, clothing, tools. Then you can preach to them and get them to pray.
Your ideal, children, is to become men. A man knows what he wants and accomplishes it, no matter what it costs. Do not turn out to be aimlessly wandering shadows. Spiritual values are proper to men. Our financial and social situation can change, our personal, intellectual and moral value remains.
Take it to heart to develop the personality in you, the gift that God gave you.
The Christian life will be inculcated in the children starting from the liturgy of the Mass. Only one must go to the trouble of minting it, making it thirty-five living, sung, interesting and basically happy minutes.
The children must get the taste for the things of God, without being overdosed.

Fr. Brottier's eloquence was touching when he spoke to the first communicants.

Children, today I have a favour to ask you at the moment when the Master of heaven and earth is in your heart. What is it? Money? No. Prayers. By your fund of prayers you are the lightning-conductors of this house of Auteuil.

This was not paternalism. In the playground stands a statue of Fr. Brottier stretching his cloak over a poor lad, one of those Paris urchins, more or less vagabond, that he would receive for a few months to prepare for first holy communion. Their ignorance was notorious and their replies ingenuous. Instead of punishing this one who had run away and been brought back, Fr. Brottier drew him to himself and a friendship was made. Many former students testified by letters and visits how much they appreciated and loved him. "True goodness", he used to say, "is that which one procures for others".

"Recollection is the state of a soul present to itself and to God" (N.D. XI 546).

People who had to deal with Fr. Brottier found that he was always in union with God. Fr. Pichon recalls: "When anyone went to see him, he laid down his pen, listened attentively, then replied as if he was repeating words he heard in the depths of his heart". Coming out of his room, priests were known to say, "You would think our Lord was speaking when he replies". A lady testified to the same thing: "When you asked him for advice, he would raise his eyes to heaven. He would reply immediately or else would say, "I will write tomorrow", or "Call me on the phone". This meant he was not clear before God just then". Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit that he enjoyed, that of counsel was outstanding, as it was in Fr. Libermann. Bishops came to consult him on their way through Paris, like Cardinal Verdier, who spoke openly of his holiness on the day of his funeral. Bishop De Langavant of Reunion, now retired at Langonnet, says: "I had only two occasions to meet and talk with Fr. Brottier. I knew his work by hearsay and I was expecting to meet an excited, nervous, jumpy man, worn down by his many cares and worries. On the contrary, I was struck by his serenity, patience, goodness that nothing could trouble. I felt sure that only an intense interior life and constant union with God could bring about such virtue. When, after his death, there was talk of 'saintly Fr. Brottier' I knew I was not mistaken, I was not surprised"

His presence to himself, his self-possession in peace, was so habitual to him that it seemed normal and natural to anyone who did not know his burning, sensitive, tender and violent character. A hasty word or inconsiderate action never escaped him, even when faced with difficulties, opposition and misunderstanding. His own brother said: "I never saw him discouraged, even though he was often dreadfully tired. When something he understook did not succeed he would say, "We did not go about it the right way; we will try again and see". Unjust criticism wounded him but did not make him waver. "We will wait for them on the rebound", he would say laughingly". At the seminary he had given the impression of a boy who was turbulent and quarrelsome. By dint of prolonged sustained efforts he gradually achieved a self-control that gave the appearance of perpetual serenity.

"Christian perfection consists in a perfect union of love with our Lord, founded on complete self-denial" (N.D. II 133).

Recollection and self-denial are the conditions Fr. Libermann gives for an apostle to be led by the Holy Spirit. Fr. Brottier took our Lord's words at their face-value: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8 : 34). He did no extraordinary penances, nor sought them. His cross was the dreadful headaches he suffered ever since he was a boy, increasing according to his responsibilities and, perhaps, his holiness. Archbishop Le Hunsec said, "Fr. Brottier's merit was to work while struggling every day against atrocious headaches. When asked about this he would reply, "the boiler is still overheating". He did not complain. His only relaxation was three or four weeks holiday at Saverne, in one of our houses, where the superior was one of his good friends. To that Spiritan he would say on his death-bed, "Fr. Groell, I am off". And Fr. Groell, far away in Saverne, heard him distinctly in the middle of the night!"

He suffered from congestion, which made his face flushed. "What a fine complexion you have", those who did not know his sickness would say. "I have no quarrel with my complexion", he would murmer, "but with its complex causes". He got through an amount of work with that persistent migraine. The Lord was giving him a share in his passion, to which he had a special devotion. Fr. Pichon writes:

"He suffered terribly from headaches, but he was a hardened worker, nothing daunted him. I often saw him mix eight or ten aspirin tablets into his soup. I told him it was imprudent, it would poison him. He said it was the only way he could work in the afternoons. He did everything in his power not to be interrupted in his task, and in fact he never was. But he suffered to the end; I think God allowed those physical trials to increase his merits. He used to say, "I do not know what it is to write without a headache". But his head was always clear. He had a gift of improvising on his feet. A week before he died I entered his room and saw him weeping profusely, head in hands. "You are suffering greatly". "Yes, for several hours, uninterruptedly; there is no way out", he said".

His evening rosary was a daily moment of relaxation. He used to say it walking alongside the chapel deeply recollected, in the children's playground. His power of concentration was clear from the easy way he settled into prayer or celebrating the Eucharist.

"Strength and gentleness, that is the divine action and also a summary of all apostolic activity" (L.S. II 468).

Fr. Maurice Briault insisted that Fr. Brottier's greatest virtue was his strength, a calm, persevering strength that nothing could diminish, neither the inertia around him nor the misunderstandings or even outbursts — which, incidentally, he preferred to eulogies. This is the characteristic of the Holy Spirit's living presence: *fortiter et suaviter.* A climate of strength, gentleness and peace is described by Fr. Libermann as the atmosphere that gives free rein to the Spirit of Pentecost. Fr. Pichon says: "What best shows Fr. Brottier's heroic strength is his calm and unruffled serenity all the time in a house like this where catastrophes are daily happenings: a child runs away, a workman injures his hand, an employee complains about a boss. By evening-time everyone has lost patience except Fr. Brottier".

"What matters is to live all day long in practical union with God" (N.D. XIII 699).

Fr. Libermann coined a lapidary phrase for the secret of holiness of the apostolic person who is completely immersed in God's work, "practical union". This expression suits Fr. Brottier down to the ground. It means the habit of remaining united to God in the midst of the most diverse activities and of being totally submissive to the Holy Spirit. The more the activities increase, the greater the union. This has to be, so that the Spirit can guide those who are in peaceful self-control.

Is not that our whole responsibility as Spiritans, a special belonging to him who is the chief Agent in missionary work? Mystic and man of action like his spiritual master, Fr. Brottier was a Spiritan in the apostolic line the Holy Spirit wished for us. Fr. Libermann wrote, "The supernatural life becomes somehow natural" (E. Sp. 554), and Fr. Brottier re-echoed,

"When the supernatural becomes natural for you, then you have a true interior life".

"A cardinal principle in the interior life is to simplify things as much as possible" (L.S. I 419).

Do not complicate the spiritual life, as people often do. Yet it is a simple thing. The spiritual life is made up of little details: doing our duty to please God. In this way we are united to him all the time and become more perfect by grace. (Fr. Brottier).

Fr. Briault, an unimpeachable witness, said Fr. Brottier was humble by virtue and by intelligence. "He never became vain over his successes. His fine mind preserved him from all exaggeration in word or thought about his works. In his immense labours he often took the advice of competent and authoritative people, provided the competence was genuine. He seemed to my eyes great rather than holy. Not that I oppose these terms, but his greatness struck me, it matched his humility". Faced with what he considered minimal results in the Christian training of his young people he really wondered if he could go on asking people for money. He discussed his worry with his colleagues, and was prepared to reconsider.

It has been asked why he always wore his decorations on his soutane, protruding beneath his long beard. His brother explained: "Daniel was a humble man; the decorations he had been honoured with facilitated his task with the authorities in favour of the orphans, he saw no other use for them. One day Bishop Jalabert insisted he wear the decorations when he went to visit a ministry of state, as the bishop himself told me". Far from posing as important, he was always affable, good-humoured, treating his simplest and most distinguished visitors with equal courtesy.

There is a striking photo of Fr. Brottier and his two chaplains among the orphans on the Rue Rivoli, 10 May 1935, national feast of St. Joan of Arc. It was his big day. His work and person were known to all Paris. As he strode forward, preceded by the band and followed by 400 boys, the cry went up, "Long live Fr. Brottier". From Place de la Concorde to the Ministry of Finance he received delirious ovations. He whispered to his neighbour, "What good luck for our orphans!" He was radiant, but all the glory was theirs. "The

more one does great things, the smaller one feels; the do-nothings feel big!" was one of his sayings.

Finally he was humble because he was true. His humility and simplicity were expressions of precious traits of the Spiritan family, calling the apostles of the most abandoned to task. "Genuine simplicity", wrote Fr. Libermann, "is the virtue of the perfect" (L.S. I 238).

> **Truth is vital and I like it. It is sometimes bitter and one hesitates to say it. I beg you to do me the service of telling me things as they are, to bring me back on the right path if I have strayed. Consequently never tell me agreeable things just to please me and leave me in illusory peace. Tell me the truth.** (Fr. Brottier).

The superior general, Archbishop Le Hunsec, and his secretary, Fr. Jean Gay, used to come to Auteuil for lunch with Fr. Brottier on Sundays. A fraternal *cor unum* atmosphere would lead to wide-ranging conversation on myriad subjects. Neither man saw him as a saint, nor did any of the Spiritans interrogated at the Process, even Fr. Cabon. His sister-in-law, at whose house he sometimes stayed after his parents had died, said: "We respected and trusted him, but in general we never thought of using the word "saint" about him". Mr. Pierre Boquet, the lay colleague who knew him closest, said: "Already in his lifetime Fr. Brottier enjoyed an esteem not given to all. Great virtue was acknowledged in him, but, as for being raised to the altars one day, no one thought of it. God himself had to establish Fr. Brottier's reputation for holiness, if I may say so, by the miracles and benefits in answer to his intercession".

Another sign of his simplicity was his good humour. He could play a practical joke. For example, on arriving at St. Louis he was invited to give the Sunday sermon. One of the priests got him to practise it, whereat Fr. Brottier pretended to do it very badly; when the day came, Fr. Brottier acquitted himself perfectly, to the relief of his worried confrere! Another time he served up a cat-stew for a rabbit-stew! In community he was the life and soul of the party, much in demand, a man to work with.

> **Trust is the greatest quality in collaboration. Good will is never to be either discouraged or rushed. Our**

collaborators must be re-wound regularly, like a clock.

He was a man of friendship.

Friendship is a rare and divine thing. It is the most perfect of human sentiments because it is the purest, deepest, most free.
Freindship is the reciprocal possession of two thoughts, two wills, two virtues, two existences.
Friendship is forgetting oneself for the well-being of others.
Sharing the joys of our friends we add to the gentleness they feel; sharing their sadnesses we soften their bitterness.

Fr. Cabon testified: "What I noticed most in him is that he was a community man who, without attracting attention in the least to himself, tried to give pleasure to all and thus drew all to him". His humility was the touchstone of his community spirit.

Fr. Brottier lived out his vow of poverty in an authentic Spiritan way before God and his confreres: poverty of the apostolic type, where everything is ordered to the service of the missionary work. One little room served as both office and bedroom. The list of clothes found in his wardrobe is eloquent: two used soutanes, four shirts, four pairs of socks, six handkerchiefs and two pairs of shoes. Archbishop Le Hunsec testified: "He drove poverty to the limits. He refused the car the administrative council offered him; he used the metro and bus rather than taxis. Of the vast sums that went through his hands, he kept nothing for himself or his family or the Congregation. He had his book-keeping checked. He gave alms liberally while he was strict in administering the millions he received. Nothing must be deflected from its earmarked purpose". Fr. Briault recalled that Fr. Brottier occupied for some time an uncomfortable room near his in the Motherhouse in Paris. He never complained, living among the postal sacks that were coming in for his work.

Testifying about Fr. Brottier's spirit of obedience, Archbishop Le Hunsec said: "Everything he undertook was in understanding with his superiors. It was not easy, for he often had to convince his superiors, given the breadth of his daunting initiatives. He had the plan before his death, for example,

to gather all the orphans of France into one gigantic organization with financial and educational cooperation. His obedience was intelligent and responsible, it could relinquish personal dreams and demonstrate that superior's decisions had priority".

With his vow of chastity Fr. Brottier was a man of limpid glance, of delicacy, reserve and distinction. He could love without keeping anything for himself. He gave demanding and comprehensive training in chastity to the adolescents in Auteuil who were starved of family affection. The vow channelled the energies of his sensitive nature towards the absolute gift of himself that characterizes the apostolic person. "There is no greater love than to give one's life for those one loves".

"I will not take up that business with you now. . . I will do so with our Lord and his holy mother. . . then I will speak to you about it" (L.S. III 211).

Fr. Brottier spoke of the communion of Saints, with particular allusion to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, with whom he "conspired" mysteriously. From the moment he learnt from Bishop Jalabert that Thérèse had protected him during the war she became his confidante, benefactress, "little queen", in the extraordinary intimacy of saints!

The providence of the orphans is especially little St. Thérèse, who has taken responsibility for our house once for all.

All our friends continue trustfully to make their intentions, requests, thanksgivings to her, presenting everything that upsets and troubles them.

Human miseries from outside are added to the children's and cast into our patron saint's heart. She welcomes, consoles and heals them. The prayers of our young people bring down her shower of roses on their helpers.

He went so far as to display posters of St. Thérèse in the metro in Paris. People said, "Do you not think it out of place to put St. Thérèse on the same walls with actresses and pop stars?" He replied, "Must the metro walls be given over definitively to advertisements for music-halls, theatres or drink? Among the two or three million people who use the metro

every day, are there no Christians, devout friends of St. Thérèse? Why forbid Catholics to advertize?".

He was thought to have a secret for obtaining favours from St. Thérèse. He expressed his feelings:

> **People who come looking for my ‹secret› are funny. My secret is this: help yourself and heaven will help you. My secret, as you well know, is twelve years of work, day and night, hard and persevering, and twelve years of hard and persevering prayer by everyone at Auteuil, priests, Sisters, young people, first communicants. I have no other secret. If the good God worked miracles here, through Thérèse's intercession, I think I can say in all justice that we did everything, humanly speaking, to be deserving, and that they were the divine reward of our work, prayers and trust in providence.**

His intimacy with St. Thérèse did not remain on the level of material services. They lived the same spirit of humility, surrender, trust and zeal in collusion. "In the heart of the Church I will be love", had said Thérèse. Fr. Liagre, former novice-master in France, in a little book entitled *A Retreat with St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, which is often reproduced in the Lisieux Annals, establishes a detailed parallel between the spiritual teaching of Fr. Libermann and that of St. Thérèse, in his chapter on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He concludes with two of Fr. Libermann's statements. "There is no genuine greatness except in this life of divine love" (L.S. II 230). "The Holy Spirit leads us until it is no longer we who live but our Lord who lives and acts in us in gentleness, peace, strength and love" (L.S. II 230). St. Thérèse said on her deathbed, "Love alone counts".

"*Be as a poor victim offered by Jesus to his Father for the salvation of souls*" (L.S. IV 687).

The cathedral of the African Memorial at Dakar, "his" cathedral, was to be consecrated on 2 February 1936. That day he experienced the first attacks of the typhoid that would carry him off. "I fell on the day of my *Nunc Dimittis*", he said, "soon I will be going to heaven to sing God's praises". According to the doctor he had an unknown type of typhoidal infection from the age of thirteen, whose poisonous effects

were giving him the severe headaches all his life. The terminal typhoid fever was only a reactivation of these elements, that is why his headaches redoubled.

> **How much I suffer all over, without respite; I have nowhere to turn. I think God is telling me my task is finished and I will not be much longer with you. Fiat! Fiat! May your will be done; after all, you need nobody; yes, my God, may your will be done?**

For fear of contagion he had to be transferred to hospital. "I see my chapel for the last time", he said. "I have done all I could; God will do the rest". Paul Claudel puts similar words in the mouth of St. Francis Xavier dying in Japan and looking out to China: "I did not accomplish all I wanted to, I did all I could".

Fr. Brottier died on the morning of 28 February 1936, alone, or rather with Mary, as this prayer of his indicates, found in his breviary:

> **At the hour of my death, O Mary, whom I have often invoked, be near my deathbed. Be there as my mother would if she were alive. My paralysed tongue may not be able to pronounce your name, but my heart will be calling it, as it does now for the fearful moment. Will I be alone, without a loving hand to close my eyes? It does not matter. I will die with a smile in your presence. This I hope, this I believe, this I know for certain.**

Other anecdotes are told. A good friend of Auteuil, seriously ill, invoked Fr. Brottier the next morning, the 29th, when she learnt of his death from the newspaper, and was healed. An unbroken procession of about 15,000 people filed past his remains, and thousands more have prayed at his grave ever since. As Cardinal Verdier said at the funeral, "The Christian, and especially the saint, never departs from us completely".

A few hours after Fr. Brottier's death, Fr. Pichon, his successor, was handed an envelope from an anonymous donor containing eighty-four thousand-franc notes "for the orphans of Auteuil, from St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus". Thérèse at that crucial moment was continuing her maternal influence from heaven, henceforth with Fr. Brottier alongside her. So it goes on.

"Be holy as Jesus was holy; this is the one and only way to redeem and sanctify souls" (N.D. XIII 144).

Blessed James Laval and Daniel Brottier were two Spiritans very different in character, involved in different ministries, but much alike in their path to holiness. They were apostles of unflagging zeal, men of exceptional breadth of activity, consumed by love for people, especially the most deprived, and no less consumed by love for God. They integrated these two loves in simplicity. After their death they pursue their apostolate to the most abandoned. They are living signs by which the Lord maps our route.

Alphonse Gilbert, C.S.Sp.

N.B. All the quotations given without reference are from the process for the cause of beatification, in the archives of the Spiritan Research and Animation Centre, Rome.

The texts in italics are from Fr. Libermann (ND = Notes and Documents; LS = Spiritual Letters). The texts in bold face are from Fr. Brottier, collected *passim* from the works or reviews mentioned at the end of this issue of *Spiritan Papers*.

DANIEL BROTTIER, THE HOLY GHOST FATHER

Those among the Spiritans, mostly French, who knew Fr. Brottier personally are few in number today, and all are over sixty years of age. They would have known him only from the Orly novitiate or Chevilly scholasticate. They would hardly have known him outside Auteuil, for he seldom left it except for meetings of the general council at the Motherhouse on Rue Lhomond, where most were of an age then not to be living now. Younger confreres, scholastics, might have met him at Auteuil at a "Good Cinema" show, an original idea of Fr. Brottier's, appreciated by the orphans and by all who liked a good moment of healthy relaxation. Personally I recall his tall figure in the Chevilly chapel. I think it was July 1935 at the solemn consecration to the apostolate: a glorious summer's day, confrere-friends leaving for the missions they were appointed to on that day — some part of the African world, the West Indies, or alas! only France! Everything was excitement in that house some would never see again. "We promise to meet around the Venerable Father". In those rows of white surplices over the black Spiritan soutane I can still see Fr. Brottier's radiant peaceful face, his beard flowing down over the strings of the surplice, his eyes flashing around or hidden in recollected prayer. He incarnated a type of missionary of the heroic mould, although we knew he had never been a missionary except in Senegal, which we felt was close to Paris. Wasn't Dakar a suburb of Marseilles? Even though he was not a Bishop Augouard he knew he was no second-class missionary. His health had not allowed him venture all the way to the equator, but at Dakar and St. Louis he had worked hard, sweated, shaken with fever and suffered migraines enough to have to come home.

After his heroic and legendary dedication as a chaplain during the great war, he "lighted" at Auteuil, to rescue the colossal organization of the orphan-apprentices from near-

extinction. I admit it never dawned on me that he might be a Saint and I would be promoting his cause! The circumstances of his death some months later, in February 1936, shed more light on his personality. It was a big sacrifice to die without being able to attend the consecration of the cathedral at Dakar, the African Memorial. From his sick-room he radiated the happiness of a job well done, blessed by God, which he would never see with his eyes even though it was he who had drawn up the plans and financed the construction by his alms, his calls to generosity and the support of many people, Christians and non-Christians. Cardinal Verdier, just back from consecrating the cathedral, officiated at his funeral and declared him a man of great virtue. It is to the honour of his confreres around him, and of his superiors, that they preserved and nourished the *fama sanctitatis*, the reputation for holiness, that is quite in place.

The human successes of Fr. Brottier, his great work as builder, director, after his years of zeal and courage in the dangers of war, are explained by his charity. From 1946 to 1952 the first process for his beatification took place in Paris, with ancillary ones at Blois and Dakar. The apostolic process took place at Paris from 1962 to 1963. 116 witnesses testified. It may not be realized that few Spiritans made depositions. One of the Consultors on the Virtues wrote:

"Practically all the witnesses were eye-witnesses, although two or three had only occasional contact with him. Almost all these witnesses were of great value because of their knowledge; among them were three bishops of the Holy Ghost Congregation and a member of the French Academy, Henri Bordeaux. It is strange that for this religious most witnesses were outsiders and not confreres; of the latter there were ten. This is understandable from Fr. Brottier's kind of activity, as a missionary, as a military chaplain, as director of Auteuil, where almost all his colleagues were not confreres. This gives more weight to the witnesses, greater objectivity, since they could observe him over many years".

Frs Yves Pichon and Emile Herbinière, and later Frs Marc Duval and Joseph Boegly, in conformity with the desires of the Motherhouse, undertook or continued the steps of his cause. Any delays were not their fault. Besides, we have arrived at the end too soon — the required fifty years between death and beatification are not complete. In the report of one of the

six Consultors on the heroicity of his virtues I read the following unsigned lines with pleasure; the writer spoke from his heart.

"One memory is that when the seminarians of St. Sulpice asked permission to visit Auteuil, the permission was always granted. The superior would say, Go, you have in Fr. Brottier the example of a faithful and total priesthood".

Isn't that our ideal?

Marcel Martin, C.S.Sp.
Postulator of the Cause
French Seminary, Rome

EPILOGUE

Daniel Brottier's greatness is something that non-French-speaking sectors of the Congregation may learn to their surprise from this issue. Hardly anything has been written on him heretofore except in French. When his name appeared in the *Osservatore Romano* in January 1983, as a Holy Ghost Father whose virtues are recognized as "heroic" by the Holy See, it was time to know him and make him known. Unlike the situation of Fr. Libermann and Blessed Fr. Laval, most of us in the Congregation are contemporaries of Fr. Brottier, in the sense that we were born, and many were professed, before his death in 1936.

Exceptional though he was among us, his life might be termed typically "Holy Ghost" or Spiritan in an ideal way. After a willing spell of seven years in West Africa that damaged his health to the extent that he could never go back to the missions, he, a man of intense energy, threw himself into working with, and living among, the most abandoned of Paris. He created a "Boys' Town" of bricks and mortar, of waifs and raggamuffins, that multiplied itself throughout France and did, in the simplest phrase, much good. But the *mystique* of Auteuil goes further than buildings and past-students. The influence of the man Brottier took on an autonomy from his work in the little campus — already in his life and increasingly after his death — to find a target in the physical and spiritual misery of various strata of Paris's poor and abandoned. The people's recognition of this is the "popular devotion" that is at work towards having him canonized. His remains, lying inconspicuously in the right transept of the church he built, is at the heart of the Auteuil enterprise in many senses.

Every Spiritan will think of his pet comparisons with Fr. Brottier, confreres whose memory he venerates and whose parallel with Brottier is an endorsement that the Spiritan charism is workable in flesh and blood. I think of Bishop Joseph Shanahan. They were born and died within a few years of each other. According to photos and eye-witness descrip-

tions, they had similar temperament, physique and even looks, flowing beard included. Both were consumed with Libermannian zeal, and both had an extraordinary devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Shanahan prayed at her grave in Lisieux, and spoke with her four sisters at the Carmel, as early as 1920, some months before being ordained bishop. As Fr. Brottier prepared his orphans for first communion, Bishop Shanahan prepared his people for baptism. "Magnificent people", he would say of the Africans, "a shame to see them without the faith". Neither man seems to quote Fr. Libermann expressly, but both of them lived his ideals both in the missionary apostolate and in spirituality.

Spiritan zeal will go on finding new outlets. Auteuil is in competent hands now without too much Spiritan commitment in personnel, while the holiness of Fr. Brottier continues to radiate from it. The poor and abandoned, "magnificent people without the faith", will always attract young Spiritans, works "for which the Church has difficulty in finding apostolic labourers", as our Rule puts it. The foregoing pages on Fr. Brottier show what Spiritan spirituality and zeal have in fact been able to accomplish. Within the same traditions stemming from the same founders, the rest of us will not put Auteuil on a pedestal and leave Fr. Brottier in stained glass, but will humbly acknowledge the power for good in the providential vocation God has given us.

Myles L. Fay, C.S.Sp.

FURTHER READING ON FATHER DANIEL BROTTIER

1) A short Life of Fr. Brottier, subtitled "A French Don Bosco", by his colleague, admirer and friend, Fr. Yves Pichon, C.S.Sp., was published by Auteuil in the year of his death, 1936, with a preface by the superior general, Archbishop Le Hunsec; 95 pages.

This was translated and adapted as a pamphlet in English by Fr. Joseph Mullins, C.S.Sp., published by the Holy Ghost Fathers, Dublin, 1940; 40 pp.

2) A thorough full-scale biography was produced by the same Fr. Pichon two years later, 1938, with a preface by Henry Bordeaux of the French Academy; 400 pages, many illustrations.

3) *This Priest Had Two Souls*, a biography by Christine Garnier, 1956.

4) *The Servant of God, Daniel Brottier*, by Mgr Cristiani, Paris 1962; 243 pages.

5) A full account and study of the chapel of Auteuil dedicated to St. Thérèse was published by Madame G-G Beslier in 1930, with an epilogue by George Goyau of the French Academy; 95 pages.

6) The same Madame Gernier published a biography in 1937.

7) *Le Père Brottier*, text by Christine Garnier, Preface by Fr. Carré, O.P., of the French Academy, Paris 1981. This is an attractive, colourful coffee-table book of 80 pages.

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All the above are in French except as noted in n° 1).

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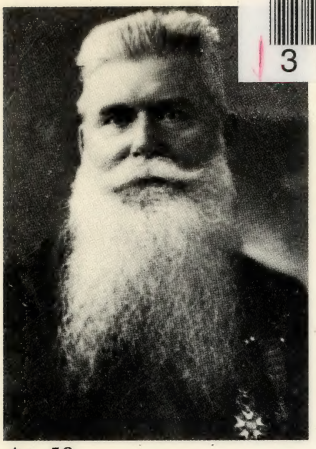

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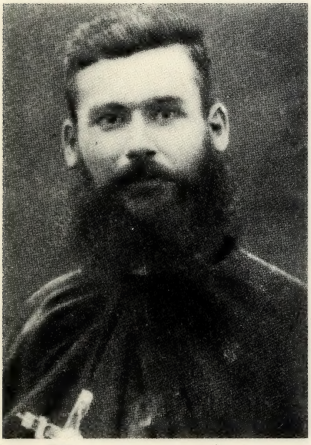

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direction of priestly at Vatican II. The decree on the priesthood firmly stated that a priest is to seek his holiness in and through his pastoral ministry. This marks a shift from the school of thought typified by Dom Chautard's *The Soul of the Apostolate*, so popular earlier in the century; Dom Chautard spoke of the priest as building up a reservoir of grace by his inner life of devotion. However, when priests turn to look for models of this pastoral style of holiness, they may have difficulty in finding a modern man committed to this way whose virtue has been recognised by the Church. This difficulty is overcome by a study of the life of Blessed Daniel Brottier, a man who has lived through the traumas of our age – war, poverty and the struggle to keep faith in an alien world. Alphonse Gilbert and Myles Fay have collected together a series of studies on him. They believe this will help other priests work at their sanctification in the light of the gospel presented in this life, which is, in many ways, a living commentary on the teaching of Vatican II on priestly holiness.

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